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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses various reasons for implementing a principal evaluation program and describes how such a program could be accomplished. The author argues that principal evaluation based on performance objectives is more meaningful than evaluation based on predetermined performance standards with unilateral ratings by the principal's superiors. According to the author, principal performance evaluation requires (1) the establishment of appropriate work goals, (2) the development of a clear-cut program of action, (3) the collection of leadership productivity evidence, (4) frequent contacts between administrator and evaluator, (5) a performance self-assessment by the administrator, (6) an administrator performance assessment by the evaluator, (7) an evaluation conference, and (8) some appropriate followup action. (Author/JF)

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PRINCIPALS: WHO'S EVALUATING THEM, WHY, AND HOW?

by
George B. Redfern

The best source I know to answer the questions in tonight's topic is a recent publication of the Educational Research Service of the American Association of School Administrators and the NEA Research Division. Trends in the evaluation of administrative and supervisory personnel are cited. For example, it is pointed out that:

- An increasing number of school systems have developed and are carrying out systematic evaluation procedures for principals and other administrators.

- In 1964, only 50 evaluation programs--many very informal--were reported in operation. In 1968, the number had increased to 62 and in 1971, the total was 84.

- The larger the school system, the more likely an evaluation program exists for principals and other administrative personnel.

- Evaluation programs apply to all administrative personnel in most instances.

- The most common practice is to evaluate personnel annually.

- Among the various purposes of evaluating principals and other administrators, the following four reasons predominate:

  (a) to identify areas needing improvement,
  (b) to measure current performance against prescribed standards,
  (c) to establish evidence to dismiss personnel,
  (d) to enable the individual to formulate appropriate performance objectives.

- The ERS survey revealed that about 75% of the responding school systems evaluate administrators by means of predetermined performance standards, ratings being made numerically or by descriptive phrases, or by written comments with indications of needed improvements.

- The remaining 25% of the reporting systems have adopted the performance objectives method of evaluation wherein tailored objectives, cooperatively determined, are the focus of evaluation.

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- A trend is discernible wherein states are beginning to mandate evaluation by statute. At least five states have enacted such laws (California, Florida, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington). South Dakota's Professional Relations and Responsibilities Act requires evaluation for teachers, and some systems in the state apply it to administrators as well.

- Larger school systems tend to use predetermined performance standards to evaluate administrative and supervisory personnel while the performance objectives approach is used most often in smaller systems.

- Assistance is generally provided the individual who receives an unsatisfactory evaluation. This usually is in the form of counseling with concrete suggestions for improvement.

So much for some of the findings of the 1971 ERS survey. That publication is very valuable because it reports specific evaluation procedures (including forms) in eleven school districts. In addition, a good bibliography on the subject of administrative and supervisory evaluation is included.

The remainder of my remarks will be devoted to the why and how of the evaluation of principals, as I perceive it. But, first, some beliefs:

1. The principal's productivity can be evaluated. Not only can it be, but it should be evaluated.

2. The principal should understand what's expected of him. Responsibilities and expectations should be stated in written form and, if not in writing, oral understandings should be clear and carefully delineated.

3. The principal should know to whom to look for direction and supervision and should understand that evaluation is an inherent component of accountability.

4. Standards of excellence should be designed to be used by the principal as "yardsticks" against which his performance may be measured.

5. Performance objectives, related to the standards of excellence, should be formulated cooperatively by the principal and his evaluator and used to evaluate performance.

Built upon these five beliefs, the remainder of my presentation is devoted to the thesis that evaluation is more meaningful if based upon performance objectives than upon predetermined performance standards with

unilateral ratings by the principal's superiors.

Productivity - Defining leadership productivity in education is more complex than in many other managerial endeavors whether productivity be measured in terms of units produced, accidents averted, wastage prevented, improvements initiated, or costs reduced. Productivity in the principalship is not so concrete. Despite the perplexities inherent in assessing the principal's productivity, the need to do so is of the utmost urgency. Ways must be found to evaluate leadership output and to stimulate higher levels of achievement.

Arch Patton, writing in The Arts of Top Management, A McKinsey Anthology, published in 1971, calls attention to Arnold Toynbee's A Study of History as a source from which to gain insight and understanding as to the causes of growth and development in a civilization. Patton draws lessons for managers from Toynbee's conclusions. Toynbee, you may recall, wrote:

- Civilization growth originates with creative individuals or small minorities which first achieve their inspiration or discovery and then convert their particular society to this new way of life.

- Civilizations develop in response to a challenge of special difficulty which rouses man to make an unprecedented effort, and a successful response to such a challenge is more likely to occur in a "hard" rather than an "easy" environment.

What lessons can be learned from Toynbee's conclusions and Patton's analysis? Perhaps four implications:

1. A school can be likened to a small society--a civilization in miniature.

2. It develops around a central core of goals and objectives.

3. It matures and flourishes when strong leadership moves the organization forward to achieve the goals.

4. A "hard" rather than "easy" environment is more likely to generate leadership growth and productivity than impede its development.

Evaluation - The traditional emphasis in evaluation is one of post-performance rating based upon predetermined standards. Great stress is placed upon the use of rating scales and checklists. Raters are presumed to be able to judge administrative behavior and leadership actions in all their facets. Judgments allegedly are made valid by multiplying supervisory samplings and/or by using more than one rater. I find this an over-simplified approach to evaluation. I doubt its validity. I am dubious about its usefulness, and I am apprehensive about its consequences.

I prefer, and am prepared to advocate, an evaluation process that has as its primary purpose the improvement of performance. As Virgil K. Rowland, a well known industrial personnel manager, wrote more than a decade ago:

> Since it is management's job to manage, then the effort should be primarily and immediately to help the managers do better what they are already doing....

I endorse this point of view. Leadership performance can be improved in several ways and systematic evaluation is one of the means.

So, to repeat, productivity of the principalship can be evaluated. The process for doing so is evaluation by objectives.

Job Understanding - Giving lip service to the importance of knowing what is expected of one is easy. But more than rhetoric is required. One wonders why so many school administrators are reticent about tackling the task of clarifying performance responsibilities and indicating performance expectancies. Is the task too difficult or too time consuming? Nevertheless, job understanding is absolutely essential. It is basic in the evaluation process.

Standards of excellence - Yardsticks of excellence are important in the formulation of performance objectives. What are standards of excellence? In a non-educational setting they might be:

- par on a difficult golf course

- a .300 batting average in baseball
- a perfect game in bowling
- first chair in a symphony orchestra
- a straight A average in college

These standards of excellence--and others like them--are readily understandable if nonetheless hard to attain. Leadership performance in education also needs standards of excellence toward which the administrator may strive. Examples of possible standards of excellence for a principal might be:

- Design and implement a delivery system for instructional materials and equipment that will assure teachers' receiving items ordered no later than 5 days from date of requisition. Assessment to be made on the basis of extent to which time limit has been consistently met.

- Plan, organize, and implement an instructional program that will rank at or above the 75th percentile among comparable schools in the system on the basis of the following evaluative criteria: comprehensiveness, relevance, and client-centeredness. Assessment to be in terms of judgments of central office personnel and a representative sampling of opinions of students, teachers, and parents.

- Allocate 50% of principal's time to instructional and evaluation activities. Assessment to be based upon fulfillment of the time allocation.

- Design and carry out a program of remedial action for students receiving failing grades to reduce the incidence of failure. Measure effectiveness of the program against a goal of reducing student failures each semester by 25%.

The standard of quality in all these personnel activities is to achieve as close to 100% effectiveness as possible, measured in as concrete terms as possible.

Performance objectives - Performance objectives are the specific targets the principal, in cooperation with his evaluator, chooses in moving toward the attainment of standards of excellence in any given area.

Objectives should be concrete and specific, tailored to the particular needs of the individual principal, designed to facilitate implementing action, and amenable to assessment. The number of objectives will vary. If

accomplished, they should enable the principal to move closer to the attainment of the standards of excellence toward which he is striving. Greater productivity is the ultimate aim. This approach to evaluation makes it possible not only to obtain better estimates of productivity, but also to make accountability more than a cliché.

Program of Action - The burden of responsibility for designing a program of action to attain performance objectives rests primarily with the individual principal. His evaluator obviously should suggest ways and means to achieve objectives. Operational contacts between the two should be used to check on "how things are going."

The principal need not confine his efforts only to attaining the performance objectives. He is obliged to do the whole job. Job targets are agreed upon as areas of emphasis in which special efforts are directed during the evaluation period. Flexibility should be exercised in assessing the importance of various tasks to be accomplished and to fix upon those that have particular significance for a given time and circumstance.

It is well to hold intermediate evaluation conferences during the year to discuss progress being made in the attainment of performance objectives. It is inadvisable to wait until the end of the year to assess the extent of accomplishment.

Self-Assessment - Seeing ourselves as others see us is easier said than done. Self-assessment is a subtle process. It involves the capacity to weigh strengths and weaknesses; to measure accomplishment against declared goals; to admit failure as well as accept success; and to evaluate achievement in terms of one's own concept of satisfactory service rather than in terms of comparing accomplishment with that of others who are doing the same type of job in the school system.

Self-assessment is an attempt to estimate accomplishment and to identify problems that may have impeded it. The problem is to minimize reluctance to admit inadequate performance for fear that the evaluator may "downgrade" his estimate of accomplishment. It becomes very important that self-assessment be viewed in proper perspective. It is the starting point of a comprehensive assessment of performance effectiveness.

Assessment by Evaluator - This is a crucial aspect of the total process. The evaluator must make a forthright assessment of the extent to which the principal has achieved success in attaining the predetermined performance goals. His judgment must reflect a thorough knowledge of behavioral changes that have taken place, recognition of supervisory assesstance provided, and the results that have been achieved.

Candor requires that praise be given when due; criticism, when warranted. Above all, evaluate estimates should be supportable by evidence gained by observations and visitations, data collected, conferences held, and assistance provided. All of this should be done in a framework of fairness and objectivity.

Evaluations should be made after the following questions have been carefully considered:

1. Are assessments related to performance goals?
2. Are assessments based upon a careful record of contacts with the principal?
3. Are anecdotal notes related to operational contacts?
4. Has supervisory assistance been adequate?
5. Have periodic intermediate conferences been held during the year?

Evaluation Conference - Many evaluation conferences are not successful or rewarding because ample preparation is not made. Most evaluators agree that

discussing job performance is perhaps the most important part of the entire evaluation process. Yet, it cannot be denied that frequently neither the principal nor his evaluator look forward to this conference.

There is no recipe for conducting a totally satisfactory conference. As has been said, good preparation will help. The security of knowing that all of the evaluator's obligations during the year have been fulfilled will be a big help. Experience, however, is the biggest factor. Only as the evaluator learns by doing in all kinds of situations, is he likely to develop the assurance and confidence necessary to conduct an effective onference.

Follow-Up - The conference will yield ideas for follow-up action. The need for certain kinds of subsequent activities to reinforce actions taken during the year is likely to become evident. Pinpoint these activities. Consider next steps.

If it appears that follow-up assistance should be given, the evaluator should make commitments realistically. Promises that can't be kept shouldn't be made.

It is easy to forget what is said in a conference. The rush of events and pressure of other duties can readily dim the recollection of what transpired. Thus, simple notes--easily accessible--should be kept to insure that appropriate follow-up action may be taken.

Conclusion - The performance of principals and other leadership personnel should be evaluated periodically in order to promote improvements in leadership performance. This process will require:

- establishment of appropriate work goals
- development of clear-cut program of action
- collection of evidence of leadership productivity
- more frequent contacts between administrator and evaluator
- self-assessment of performance by administrator
- assessment of administrator's performance by evaluator
- evaluation conference
- appropriate follow-up action

The ultimate goal is to set in motion mutually agreed upon objectives that will improve leadership performance. These factors constitute the basic elements in a sound program of leadership evaluation.

The late R. K. Stoltz, well known consultant in organizational planning, executive development and compensation, and executive performance appraisal, wrote a chapter in the anthology The Arts of Top Management referred to earlier. Among the things he says about executive development is that:

> The nub of the problem remains that of appraisal. Now appraisal becomes a continuous, cumulative process. As promising younger men are tested in increasingly difficult job assignments, management constantly adds to its knowledge of individual capabilities and of the company's total manpower resources.

Top level school administrators, in developing the productivity of principals, are well advised to:

- Collect and use factual information plus evaluation data to point up leadership strengths and weaknesses.
- Take the kind of development action that will enable principals to overcome weaknesses and intensify strengths.
- Keep abreast of trends in leadership development and adopt those which seem most promising.
- Provide opportunities for principals to gain intrinsic satisfactions as well as extrinsic rewards in job performance.
- Remember that professional growth and development must be cultivated. Its nurture should be a high priority in the superintendent's value system.

In many respects superintendents can play a Pygmalion-like role in developing principals under their leadership. Some administrators treat their subordinates in a way that leads to greater productivity. On the other hand, many administrators treat their assistants in a manner that leads to lower performance than they are capable of achieving. It is a

matter of expectations to a large degree--high expectations tend to generate high productivity—low expectations often cause low performance.

A final word - To quote Arch Patton once again, writing in The Arts of Top Management earlier referred to:

> ...men who are strongly achievement-oriented need to have a feedback on their own performance. Behavioral science studies have repeatedly indicated that substantial performance improvement can be expected from the individual who: (1) knows the strengths and weaknesses in his performance, (2) knows what he can do to improve it, (3) has the power to make this change himself, and (4) has the incentive to do so.

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